

[Laundry Workers Lunch Hour]

Beliefs and Customs - Folk Stuff

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK 13 Form to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Vivian Morris

ADDRESS 225 West 130th Street, N.Y.C.

DATE February 23, 1939

SUBJECT Laundry Workers - Lunch Hour

1. Date and time of interview February 21st - 12 Noon to 1 P.M.
2. Place of Interview Restaurant, directly across from West End Laundry[.?.]
3. Name and address of informant
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

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SUBJECT Laundry Workers - Lunch Hour

The fifty colored and white girls of assorted ages who work in the West End Laundry, located between Ninth and Tenth Avenues on 41st Street, straggled out for their lunch hour, chatting like magpies. Out of the confusion could be heard fragmentary speech such as, "You tellin' me," "Gee girl," "A killer diller," "He said" "He didn't say nuthin of the kind." A few stopped in the laundry lunch room but the majority went across the street where the meals were more "homey," and the gossip could take on a more informal vein without the bosses sister-in-law looking down ones throat catching the words before they had scarcely reached the lips. Jane and her friend Mae drifted toward a table and plopped wearily down. Jane slowly saying, "Here it is Tuesday and I'm still tired from Kitty's week-end party. What cha gonna eat- [?] "Pigfeet?"

"Pig feet," Mae made a wry face and lifted her brown stubble of a nose forward, [md;?] the ceiling in high dudgeon, "I don't want to see another "Trotter (pigfeet) for a month." ?/

"I guess you don't" answered the dreamy eyed [lackadasoially?]. "Your old man sure bought you a mess of trotters Saturday and Sunday night. Didn't he?"

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"Yeh, he's a good guy but I'm gonna quit him," replied Mae lightly. He's getting kinda careless - cute on my hands. He's got to go. Hey, what we gonna eat? Order up sumpin [md;] sumpin fillin', cause the foreman sure got sumpin' good from me this mornin'"

"Spareribs on two (two orders)" yelled Jane, heavy on the gravy and potatoes."

"Comin' on de double," right away returned the waiter.

Jane turned facing her companion saying, "So you're gonna' breeze (quit) your ol' man huh?"

"Yeh," sighed Mae taking a long draw on a cigarette. "They ain't no good w'en they git cute. Did you see that little guy givin' me a grand rush at the party?"

"Yeah," Jane puffed on a soothing cork [[md;] ?] tipped and meditatively exhaled through her nose, "You know its darn funny, how some people seem to draw men and others don't. Here you're talkin' bout quittin' your man an' I'm doin' my best to keep mine, and still he don't want me. I swear I'm good to [him?] though."

The waiter [deftly?] placed the food in front of the two girls and waited.

"Say, what kind of cigarette is that?" asked Jane. Mae took one from her pack and passed it to Jane.

"It's a fair brand, cheaper," said Mae.

"Listen Mae," said Jane, leaning closer. "This cigarette of yours may be cheaper, but always remember this - this is not a union made cigarette. See, no union stamp on it. Did you think it was fair when the boss worked you fourteen hours a day for less than ten dollars a week? Of course not. Now, when you buy a non-union cigarette you are saving a few pennies, yes, but you are making it that much harder for the members of the laboring group of the 3 factory to get a union. Lay off those weeds Mae and get a union smoke.

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They are better prepared because you know that a satisfied worker does better work than an unsatisfied one. Throw those weeds away.”

“Good sales talk, Kin,” said Mae as she plunked her ciagrettes into a waste can.

“Oh you still here? Put em' on the books,” said Jane with a wave of the hand.

“O.K. Jane,” said the waiter.

“There's such a thing as bein' too good Jane,” said Mae. “You're better looking than I am but I have better luck with my boy friends cause I'm “nonchalanchy” (take them as they come) with 'em. If I see 'em, OK - if I don't see 'em OK.”

“Well,” mused Jane picking over her food, “maybe I ain't livin' right. I think, instead of these old wild wild parties every week-end[,?] I should go to some of these “[hincty?]” (swell) affairs, like The Lafayette Theatre and see “[Androcles?] and the Lion” — that don't cost much.”

“Andro-who-and what lion?” puzzled Mae.

“Oh, its a play” laughed Jane, “put on by a Negro Federal Theatre group. I hear its a good play.”

“Yeah, that's OK.” said Mae, “but think of the sport you could have off the money you spend for a dress and a show. You must be slippin. Andro an' lions - you kill me, Jane.”

“I could have a good time with the money, but I think I need some real “[dicty?]” ([swell?]) good times,” said Jane, “I'm down in the dumps.”

“How about trying to collect that money the politician owed you since las' November - lection day?”

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"I think I may as well cross that off the books," moaned Jane.

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"They promise you the moon and when you come to collect, they're out chasing the sun."

The girls were slowly rising and filing back into the laundry door when Jane said, "Come on. Back to work we go."

But Mae was still puzzled about something[?] "You ain't serious about seeind Andro — sumpin' or the other and his lions, are you Jane."

"Sure, it's cultural stuff we need, kid," said Jane.

"O.K." answered Mae waveringly, "Guess that means I have to get a new dress too - but think of the good time we could have had with that dress and [dey?] lion money."